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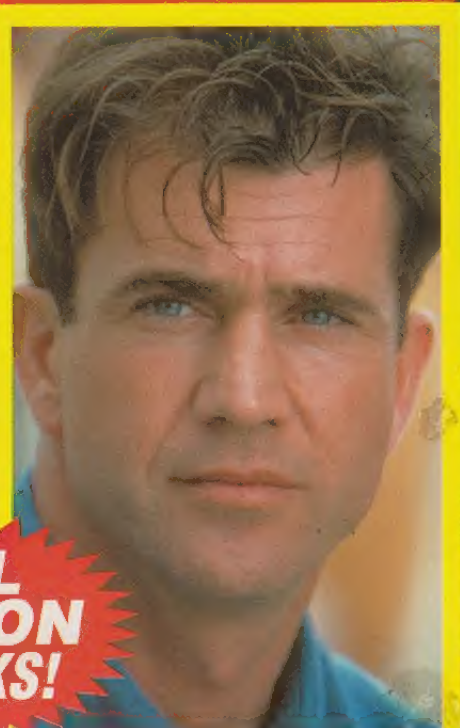
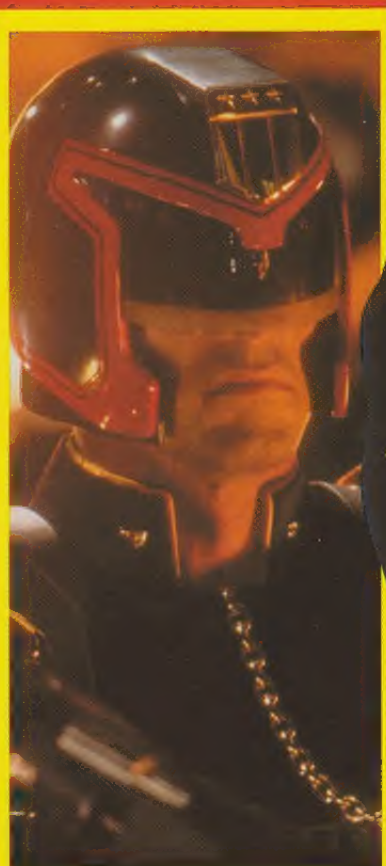
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GOTHAM NOCTURNE

The creatures
of the night
have come
out again for
"Batman
Forever."

By MARC SHAPIRO





It's a cold night in September, so cold that the wind blowing debris down Wall Street is a half-hearted whisper. The money makers of this famed avenue have long since left for the day. It's time for *Batman Forever* to begin, time for a dark knight to come out and play.

Director Joel Schumacher shifts uneasily in his director's chair, a mixture of nerves and excitement on this very first night of filming on the latest segment of the *Batman* series, which has become one of the most lucrative in motion picture history. He stands up, walks a few paces and stares down Wall Street. Five blocks down the deserted center of the real-life Gotham City stands a barricade. A signal through the portable phones indicates everything at that end is ready. Schumacher looks up the other end in the direction of a low roaring sound where a redesigned, slightly nightmarish Batmobile is crouched.

"We're ready," says a chilled Schumacher. The cameras roll. The roar up the street increases. "Action!"

The Batmobile races down the street, a sleek metal blur as it flies by Schumacher and the camera, clocking in at more than 100 miles an hour. The director looks after his bat missile as it disappears into the mouth of downtown New York. Schumacher's eyes are wide with astonishment.

"Amazing," he mutters. "Just amazing."

Double the fun, double the personalities! Two-Face (Tommy Lee Jones) and his entourage in décolletage, Sugar (Drew Barrymore) and Spice (Debi Mazar).

In a Bat flash, we are in Los Angeles, the Warner Bros. studio, outdoors, night. Even here in southern California, the weather borders on a New York kind of cold. Here, the seedy underbelly of Gotham City has sprung up weed-like in a spray of graffiti, lines hanging heavy with clothes and various sleazy-gaudy storefronts. Gotham circa *Batman*

Director Joel Schumacher has marshaled all of the forces at his command to make the third installment of the Bat-saga, *Batman Forever*, a hoot.

Forever spreads out across the same outdoor location as *Batman Returns'* much more claustrophobic urban canyons. Its denizens, a crazy-quilt mixture of punks, biker metalloids and ultra-garish street freaks and freakettes, wander aimlessly in the streets and on the sidewalks. Almost 100 days into *Batman Forever*, it's time for action again.

"Here we go, folks!" shouts an assistant director standing near Schumacher. "Picture's up." The extras swirl and move. Through the throng walks a very sultry lady of the night. She passes a group of young toughs who surround her and begin to get rough. Suddenly, off in the distance, the roar of thunder. From around a corner speeds the Batmobile with a young Dick Grayson, played by Chris O'Donnell, at the wheel. He aims the vehicle toward the confrontation. But, rather than gliding to a smooth stop and springing the Boy Wonder into action, the car slams unexpectedly into a column.

Robin, heroically, has just had an unplanned car accident while driving the Batmobile.



"Cut!" laughs Schumacher, from amid a cluster of heavy-metal extras. The car wrangler runs over to the Batmobile as O'Donnell, with a sheepish grin on his face, jumps out of the car, embarrassment his only bruise. The Batmobile is carefully checked out. Thankfully, there are no bruises there either.

The laughter continues as the Batmobile is wheeled back up the street and prepared for another run. With some time between set-ups, the stunt coordinator ushers his gang of metal thugs to a more secluded part of the set, where he begins an impromptu refresher course in giving and receiving punches and kicks.

In between shots, Schumacher exhibits the same level of enthusiasm and humor he had on that first cold night in September. "You know, [Batman creator] Bob Kane has been to the set a number of times and he made the comment one night that he didn't like the idea of Dick Grayson wearing an earring.

Jim Carrey dons the sprayed-on green question mark costume for his role as the ever-puzzling Riddler.

He just didn't understand it. He also didn't understand why the Batman suit has nipples on it. So, I had to explain it to him."

Schumacher, in a more serious vein, addresses the question of helming the third installment of the ongoing adventures of the Dark Knight. "I wouldn't have this job if Tim [director and now producer Burton] had not done such a brilliant job before me. You have to start fresh if you're the new director, you can't spend much time trying to fig-

"I wasn't scared to play Robin," Chris O'Donnell explains, "because I knew this wasn't going to be the Burt Ward Robin."

ure out what worked before. You just have to follow your instincts because that's what you've been hired to do. You have to take a lot of risks when you're taking on something that's already known, because it can very easily fail."

Batman Forever, it is immediately clear, is big. Sixty major sets, including a 60-foot-high Batcave and a 50-foot-high Wayne Manor, were built under the former Spruce Goose dome at Long Beach, CA. The special FX mix, a combination of traditional physical techniques and state-of-the-art computer enhancement, has roped in such talents as FX wizard John Dykstra and Oscar-winner Rick Baker (who created Two-Face's visage). And then there's that three-ring circus of a cast.

Replacing Michael Keaton as Batman/Bruce Wayne is Val Kilmer. Chris O'Donnell finally brings Robin/Dick Grayson to the saga. Evil's on tap in the form of Jim Carrey as the Riddler and Tommy Lee Jones as Two-Face. Nicole Kidman portrays Dr. Chase Meridian, the twisted love interest of both Bruce Wayne and

All Film Photos & Art: Courtesy Warner Bros.



"This is a younger Batman and he fits into a world that has more colors to it," offers screenwriter Akiva Goldsman, "a world that isn't as dark."

Batman. Reprising their roles from the previous Batman films are Michael Gough as Wayne's trusted butler Alfred and Pat Hingle as the indomitable representative of law enforcement, Commissioner James Gordon.

Written by Janet & Lee Batchler and Akiva Goldsman, *Batman Forever* is a madcap tale of manic duality that features the origin of Robin; the three-sided love triangle between Dr. Meridian, Batman and Bruce Wayne, and the emergence of vengeance-minded Two-Face and his alliance with former Wayne groupie-cum-insane quiz-master the Riddler. Burton and *The Fugitive*'s Peter Macgregor-Scott are producing the movie.

I think what Warner Bros. wanted with this third Batman film was something new," explains Macgregor-Scott. "They wanted to stretch the envelope. They wanted a new team and new designs. One thing they definitely did not want was a film as dark as *Batman Returns*. There was a great deal of criticism, especially from the parents of six-year-olds. The six-year-olds loved the film, but the parents weren't too thrilled. Since the par-

ents were the ones who drove the kids to the theater, we had to make sure they were happy," he laughs.

Macgregor-Scott concedes that pre-production on the film held an element of suspense in that Michael Keaton really wouldn't commit to do *Batman Forever*. "Everybody's idea at the beginning of pre-production was that Michael would play Batman. But Michael wouldn't agree to it officially, and so there were some considerations and discussions about what we would do if we didn't do the picture with Michael. Ultimately, Michael felt he needed a change and fortunately Val wanted to do it."

According to Macgregor-Scott, *Batman Forever* will be

lighter and have more of a comic book feeling, especially as it relates to the film's action sequences. "The action in *Batman Forever* is comic-book action. The violence is minimal and basically nonexistent. Batman has wonderful new toys to work with. We have a newly designed Batmobile that can race along at 100 miles an hour and suddenly make a right hand turn. Trust me, that's

something you don't have when you're making a Steven Seagal movie," he chuckles.

Schumacher, adding fuel to the action fire, is breathless as he ticks off his action faves. "We have a big fight between Batman and Two-Face. Robin and Two-Face get into it. Batman does a backflip out of a fountain. There's lots of flying and mid-air things. It's big action. Very big action."

Writer Akiva Goldsman, who took over scripting chores after a first draft by the Batchlers, claims that the action in *Batman Forever* will be balanced by the characters. He also emphasizes that the sense of character is far different than the tone of the previous two films. "The one thing we took very seriously was how to breathe new life into Batman," he explains. "This is a younger Batman and he fits into a world that has more colors to it, a world that isn't as dark and Gothic. We've made Val Kilmer very believable in all contexts of this film. When he's Batman doing action sequences, and when he's being the most charming guy in Gotham City as Bruce Wayne, it will all ring true."

Goldsman, however, cautions that there will be a definite dark and haunted quality to the movie's main characters and points to Batman and Bruce Wayne as a prime example of how the story walks on the wild side. "Batman and Bruce Wayne's motivations will be explored in the serious way that you would explore the motivations of anybody who has aberrant behavior. Bruce Wayne is somebody who has had a



"We tried to make a living comic book," states Schumacher. "We've gone back to many of the conventions of the comic books." Including the villains.

Batman Forever is a tale of duality, and who better to unravel Bruce Wayne's twisted psyche than the sultry Dr. Chase Meridian (Nicole Kidman), Bat-shrink?



profound trauma and that trauma resulted in his acting out as Batman. He knows what it's like to have his life ruled by revenge."

The frogmen are already splashing around in the huge pool on the Warner Bros. lot as Chris O'Donnell, dressed as Robin, steps to the water's edge. The stunt coordinator adjusts weights that will anchor him near the pool's bottom. O'Donnell is handed a Bat-breathing device which he tests. There's a smile on his face, a nervous smile. He steps off the edge and sinks to the bottom. He continues to

Director Schumacher and screenwriters Janet & Lee Batchler and Goldsman wanted to make *Batman Forever* something special, so they added a little Sugar.

Photo: Ralph Nelson



breath through the device. At the director's signal, the frogmen attack Robin as he struggles underwater. At one point in the action, one of the frogmen reaches in and rips the breathing device out of Robin's mouth.

"That was the scariest thing I've done on this film," admits O'Donnell. "I was struggling like I couldn't breathe and wondering, 'What if I really couldn't breathe?' How are they going to know whether I'm acting or drowning? I was so weighted down I couldn't swim to the top. At one point, they reached out to hand me another breathing device and the water was so murky, I couldn't find it."

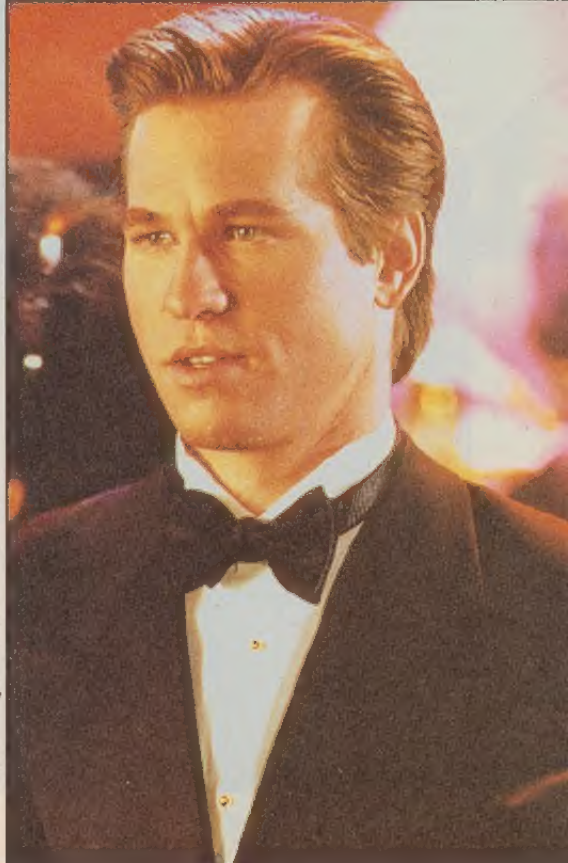
The actor looks back on that brush with a watery grave shortly after principal photography's completion and a couple of days before a pickup shot will have him speeding down a waterway at the wheel of the Batboat (and not repeating his previous Bat-accident). Needless to say, he's quite pleased with the action sequences that punctuate the film.

"I have this big fight with Two-Face outside the Riddler's lair," he reports. "And there's this street fight sequence where I get to beat up on [martial arts actor] Don 'The Dragon' Wilson. When I got the part of Robin and read the script, I was psyched. I knew this was going to be great."

O'Donnell had little contact with *Batman* comics growing up but he

"When Val Kilmer's Batman doing action sequences, and when he's being the most charming guy in Gotham City as Bruce Wayne, it will all ring true," Goldsman says.

Photo: Ralph Nelson



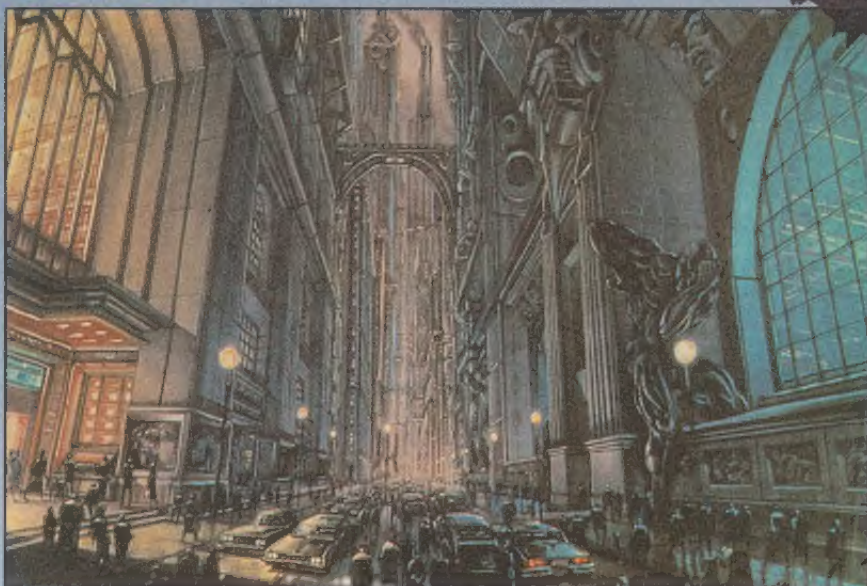


"The Frank Miller *Dark Knight Returns* comic books were a very strong influence," reveals FX whiz John Dykstra.

did watch the Adam West *Batman* TV series. "I wasn't scared to play Robin, because I knew this wasn't going to be the Burt Ward Robin. I knew playing this Robin was going to be a totally different situation.

"Dick Grayson has a circus background," he continues. "He has been living on the road, so there's a kind of toughness to him. When his parents get killed, it's a very traumatic thing and he sets out to avenge their deaths. The relationship he has with Bruce Wayne is also different. He looks at people like Bruce Wayne with all their money and kind of resents them."

O'Donnell, whose previous action outing, *The Three Musketeers*, prepared him for the kind of stuntwork



Dykstra says, "We used color and light and miniature photography and computer graphics to bring Gotham City to life in a new way."

and derring-do required in this film, claims that he was slow coming around to a Robin frame of mind. He started getting in the crimefighting mood when he was buried in the mold used to create his hi-tech costume. But, like every actor who ever put on a mask to fight crime, the turning point was his first day on the set. "The first day I put on the costume, walked out of my trailer and onto the set; that was the moment for me. I passed by a mirror and looked. I said, 'Wait a second! That's me...and I'm Robin.'"

When John Dykstra was called in to handle the special FX on *Batman Forever*, he was delighted to find out that the film's tone would adhere to a comic-book graphic novel. "I could see it in the script and in my conversations with Joel," he says. "Every move,

every lineup, everything in this picture gets to have that extra pizzazz to it."

Consequently, Dykstra went to the source to prepare himself for the task of bringing paneled pages quite literally to the screen. "The Frank Miller *Dark Knight Returns* comic books were a very strong influence in terms of what this movie's images would be like. Every image in the books indicated motion to come or motion completed. I saw that perspectives were forced and I could already envision that this movie would be a very exciting way to bring those stills to life."

Batman Forever's FX package, according to Dykstra, is a mixture of conventional animation and computer FX. "We have computer-generated cities and action sequences, compositing, matte paintings, split screens, you name it and we're using it. But rather than go at this from a perspective of letting the FX dictate what we do, we've stuck with our original design concept and just let the FX fall naturally into it."

One of Dykstra's show-stopping effects in the film is a computer-generated Batman for a sequence in which the Dark Knight leaps from a building. "In many of the live-action sequences, Batman's cape has been computer-generated but, in this particular sequence, we decided that it would be more practical in terms of heightening reality to do a motion capture, computer-generated figure than to use a stuntman and a descender rig."

"Batman and Bruce Wayne's motivations will be explored," Goldsman states. Even Alfred (Michael Gough) knows that Batman's origin lies in the dark.



Photo: Ralph Mahan

The FX crew was also called upon to enhance the images of the Riddler and Two-Face. "Since the characters are so much larger than life to start with, it wasn't necessary to computer enhance them. But what proved quite effective was shooting the characters and their backgrounds at different focal lengths and marrying the images together. We've also used lighting FX to enhance their bodies. Essentially, we've used non-computer FX to put them into environments that they couldn't possibly be in."

Dykstra did, however, return to computer magic when putting a new face on Gotham City. "We used color and light and miniature photography and computer graphics to bring Gotham City to life in a new way and on a different scale. We basically see more of the city; we spend more time traveling around and through it."

Day 106 of shooting finds the cast and crew crowded under the big top, a massive circus tent supported at the corners by ornate sculptures. More than 400 extras, dressed in various degrees of finery, line the bleachers. Up in the rafters, a group of stunt trapeze artists, including former Olympic gymnast and actor Mitch (American Anthem) Gaylord, are slowly making their way to a platform and limbering up for their high-flying heroics. Another group of stuntmen, dressed appropriately in black, are also getting into place, secreted in nooks and hiding places at various points on the ground and near the tent top.

Flanked by an army of assistants, Schumacher is instructing the extras when to applaud, ooh and aaah, and finally when to scream in horror. For this is the day of great tragedy, the day that the Grayson family dies at the hands of Two-Face.

The director is happy with the camera angles and, while the stuntmen are ironing out the details of the upcoming aerial mayhem, he takes a break behind a monitor to check out the latest rough assemblage of a trailer and to talk briefly about the rigors of helming *Batman Forever*, which harks back to some of his earlier fantasy outings including *The Lost Boys* and *Flatliners*.

"We tried to make a living comic book," says Schumacher, "and we've gone back to many of the conventions of the comic books. There has been a dark edge to the past films that's very much from the more modern comics. This circus scene definitely lays the groundwork for the dark side of Dick Grayson. Like Batman, his parents are about to be killed in front of him. Just like Bat-

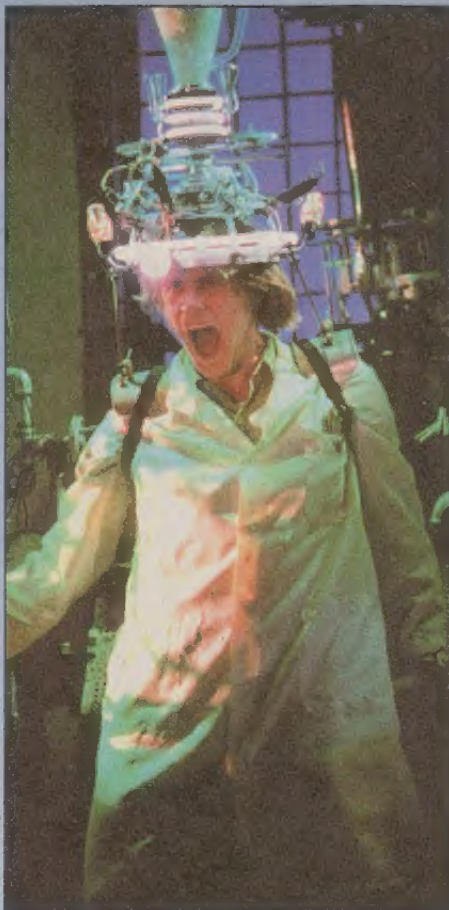


Photo: Ralph Nelson

"I don't think costuming this film was so much a challenge as it was a simple change of direction," offers Bat-vet Bob Ringwood, who gave Ed Nygma a maniacal makeover.

man's past, we're attempting to give Robin this haunted quality that he'll have to learn to deal with."

Costume designer Bob Ringwood is probably the only one who can lay claim to *Batman Forever* not being very rough. "I don't think costuming this film was so much a challenge as it was a simple change of direction," offers Ringwood, who also devised the Batsuits for the previous *Batman* films. "Joel and the producers wanted the film to be lighter and wittier, so I didn't have to change the tone of the costumes that much. All I had to do was make things more colorful and just give them a little more of that comic-book feel."

If there was a bump in Ringwood's world, it was, fairly late in pre-production, Kilmer replacing Keaton. "We couldn't use any of the costumes from the previous two films because Michael and Val were so physically different. What we decided to do this time was to design the costume to give Val a taller and sleeker appearance, sort of like a black panther. There's also a much more sexual quality to the costume this time. The costume is still armor-like, but it has less of an

armor look to it. We've built the costume up and given him more muscle. Val is still wearing tons of rubber, but we've taken great pains to soften the edges and to design the cowl to bring out more of Val's characteristics."

The task of creating Robin's outfits also sent Ringwood back to the source. "I looked at the comics and did a much sleeker version of the original costume, so that it doesn't look quite so elflike. For the more hi-tech costume he wears near the film's end, I basically took the elements of the original costume and produced a hi-tech rubber version made of green and red metallic material rather than fabric."

Ringwood reveals that the Riddler costume is made of green stretch velvet. "With Two-Face, we tried to maintain the calm district attorney side with lots of grey suits. But we kept changing the mad, extraordinary side to fit the moment. We did a half-cowboy suit, an all leather one. We just kept changing the image."

Day 107 begins back under the big top. The extras in the bleachers are gone. Once again, the stunt people climb to the platform. The bad guys are, likewise, ready. At Schumacher's signal, one of the stunt people steps off the platform and swings into space. A black-clad warrior swings out to intercept him. The circus performer swings one way. The heavy swings another and glides to the floor, ready for action. Behind a monitor, Joel Schumacher is tired but also quite excited.

"Yeah! Great shot!" he exalts. "We're going to finish it! It'll be ready, if we can get that last shot."

While Lady Gotham watches over the denizens of Gotham City, the *Batman* crew went to the real-life Gotham—New York City—for many scenes.



Photo: Ralph Nelson